

CENTER LINE



A Publication of Waukesha County's Retzer Nature Center



Fall 2014

In this issue

Morning Wake Up

Pages 1-2

Special Events

Page 3

The Celebrated Jumping Spider of Waukesha County

Pages 4-6

Retzer Plant Sale

Page 7

On Board with the Friends

Page 8

Fall Colors on the Prairie

Page 9

Coyote Update

Page 10



Upcoming Events:

- * Bird Seed Sale
Order through October 29
- * Friend's Photo Contest Entry
Deadline October 29
- * Friend's Photo Reception
November 2

Check out the EE Activity Guide for classes and events offered through the year!

[EE Activity Guide](#)

Log on to
www.waukeshacountyparks.com
for more information.

Morning Wake Up

How many of us would rather tuck back under the warm blankets when the alarm goes off in the morning? Never mind the season's change to cooler temperatures to keep us covered or the desire to catch a few extra winks. The new alarm clock here at Retzer does not possess a snooze button. In August, a scrappy young rooster was left in our parking lot. Guess he would be considered by some, wildlife, which is found on the surrounding landscape. Let us introduce Fog Horn - Leg Horn, aka Mr. Leg Horn to the staff. This youngster has filled out in his appearance over the past few months, growing from a rough and ragged looking fowl to a stately proud bird.



Mr. Leg Horn has strutted his way into the working day lives of the staff here at the Nature Center. The morning starts off with breakfast served up from the hand to bowl. A well balanced diet of seeds, insects, fruits and other delectable foods entice this resident fellow to prepare for the day's work ahead. A morning wakeup call comes with added flare when he is able to get into the maintenance garage bay and listen to his resonance as it bounces around the walls. Not to be undone by his echo, he lets off another round of crowing.

When the sun comes over the trees, he heads out in search of bit of pecking and scratching to keep him well occupied throughout the morning. As visitors and staff arrive, he will greet them, if the mode so fits into his daily routine. If not by personal appearance, he might just let you know his welcome greeting with a loud “Cock a doodle doo”.

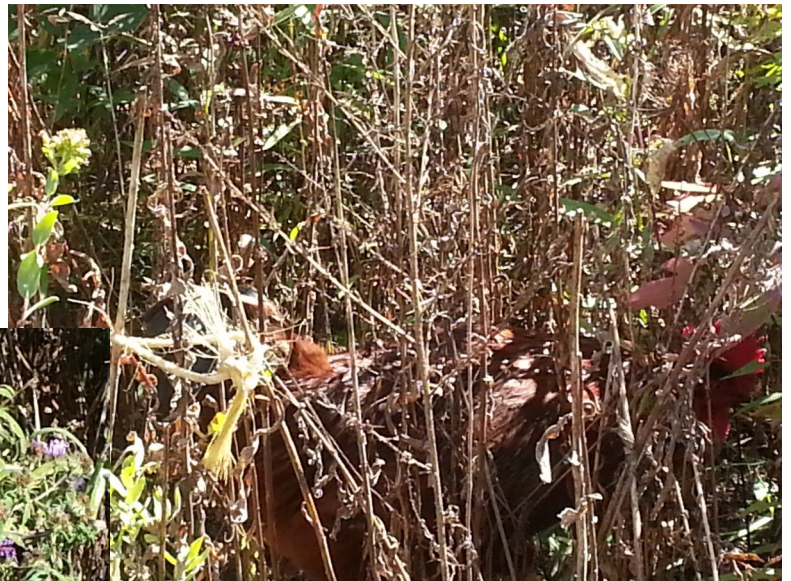
Recent visitors to the annual Apple Harvest Festival found Mr. Leg Horn an attractive addition to the day’s festivities. Hanging just outside the Apple Market in the tall vegetation, he managed to spark the interest of many visitors. After a heart-to-beak conversation with our staff member Dan, instructing him on the day’s upcoming event, he kept himself just in sight, but well out of reach. Visitors enjoyed wandering around looking for a glimpse of his bobbing comb in the tall vegetation. Heads would turn as the sound of his enthusiastic crowing gave away his hiding place. An apple core would be tossed in his direction in appreciation of a good show. Wide eyed amazement at this rooster’s desire to stay with all the commotion and noise, captured numerous photos opportunities throughout the day.

Settling in to his new home, Mr. Fog Horn has been a welcome sight each morning as staff arrive for work. If he is slow to respond to a familiar voice, or not spotted in the area, rumors start that he met his demise overnight. Not so fast, here he comes, breakfast is soon to be served and he must not go without his morning routine. The nature center’s newest addition is a character right out of an old cartoon, “I say, I say” come see for yourself this strapping young bird as he wonders the grounds.

Please don’t drop off any Chicken Hawks.

Amy Zentner

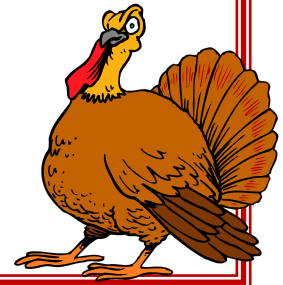
Now you see him,



now you don’t!

*"Saturday Explorations" programs
you don't want to miss!*

- Nov. 1 Attracting Wildlife to Your Land 9 am - 11 am Fee: \$5
- Nov. 15 Getting to Know Retzer Teaching Animals 10 am - 11 am Fee: \$5
- Nov. 22 Wild Turkey! Ecology of the Wild Turkey 9 - 11 am Fee: \$5
- Dec. 6 Native American History 1 - 3 pm Fee: \$5
- Dec. 13 Holiday Recipes for Wildlife 9 - 11 am Fee: \$5
- Dec. 20 The Forest in Winter 9 - 11 am Fee: \$5



Upcoming Events

**Friends of Retzer
Photo Contest
&
Reception**

**Photo Submission Deadline
October 29, 2014**

**Reception
Sunday, November 2
1 - 3:30 pm**

***Bird Seed
Sale***

Pick up Reminder

Pick up locations:

Saturday, Nov. 1 from 9 am - Noon
Nashotah Park
Minooka Park
Retzer Nature Center

Wednesday, Nov. 5
Moor Downs Golf Course 3-6 pm
Retzer Nature Center 2-5 pm

**All orders not picked up at the
designated park will be returned to
Retzer Nature Center by Monday,
Nov. 8 for pick up.**

THE LAST PRAIRIE



The Celebrated Jumping Spider of Waukesha County

I doubt many folks actually celebrate any of the spiders they meet. During such encounters, most arachnids are lucky to avoid a booted foot or rolled newspaper coming their way. As we all know, some wall-crawlers are faster than others. Some of them seem to move faster than the eye can follow. Have you ever met one that, you would swear, moved literally while you blinked? One that moves along your pencil or sidewalk with a stop-and-start, stalking gait? One that just shouldn't be able to move that fast, ever?

My name is Sherlock Holmes. It is my business to know what other people do not know. Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle"

Allow me to introduce you (more formally) to the 'here one second, gone the next' Jumping Spider family Salticidae. For those of us who like spiders, or invertebrates in general, these little marvels are famous. Unlike many Arachnids, Salticids conduct their business during the day and love the sun as much as Wisconsinites during our brief summer. This makes them fairly easy to observe; just keep your eye on them if you can. These things can move! We're talking scary fast. Spiders so fast you'll freak (which is a swell slogan). But fear not! While they may see you, they are disinterested in you for sustenance. They can bite, but only if they feel threatened, and they mostly flee if possible.



You can't blame them, you're about a billion times their size! If they do bite, it is similar to a bee sting and only dangerous if one is allergic to the venom. This is the largest known spider family, with over 4000 species of Jumpers worldwide, and North America is home to about 300 different ones (Hillyard 1998).

All the better to see you with. Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, "Little Red Cap"

When you approach one of these critters, slowly of course, they may very well stop and straighten their front legs, raising up almost as if to get a better look at you. In reality, this is probably exactly what they are doing. Jumpers have some of the best eyesight in the business. And by business, I mean invertebrates—all invertebrates (Levi and Levi 1968). They can even give some vertebrates a run for their money; especially those of us glasses-wearing bipeds. After all, we only have four eyes to their eight. Their sharp vision only makes sense considering how they catch prey. Optical perception is so good within the Salticidae that mating courtship is actually visual. Males will dance, thump, wave, and pose to attract a female's curiosity (Milne and Milne 1980).

You not only are hunted by others, you unknowingly hunt yourself. Dejan Stojanovic, “The Sun Watches the Sun”

These spiders are hunters! They work for a living! Unlike other ‘true’ spiders that build webs and then lay around all day (just kidding—we all love web-heads). Their eight eyes are arranged in three rows, with the first and foremost row containing the largest pair. This permits binocular vision, allowing a the spider to gauge distance—helpful when you’re trying to figure out if something is in range (Milne and Milne 1980). After a successful stalk, or a successful ambush, the spider watches closely and jumps when it feels right. The spectacular jump is almost entirely from extending the fourth and final pair of legs, and not from what we would call muscles. An increase in blood pressure quickly straightens the leg, making the jump locomotion due to onboard hydraulics (Hillyard 1998)—this is nearly mind-blowing. Like most of the Araneae (the Spider ‘Order’ level of classification), Jumping Spiders drop silk in the form of a ‘lifeline’ in case they miss their mark. Their ‘mark’ is usually equal or smaller size, although some have been known to take larger mosquitoes and small moths.



Allow me to introduce some friends of mine to you, who have long desired such a party as this, Grace Kennedy, “Dunallan, Or Know what You Judge”

We have about five different genera in our area. All of us probably know the Zebra Jumping Spider *Sal-ticus senicus*; the black and white one that loves patios, buildings, and dinner parties—it is very sophisticated. I noticed two other species in particular this year on the grounds at Retzer Nature Center; both from the *Phidippus* genus, common here but near nonexistent in Europe. One is *Phidippus clarus*, or the spiders with the little red butts. They are striking in black, white, and red. I have seen them jump on insects, but they are also known to wait on the underside of leaves and jump/fall on prey. The second is *Phidippus audax*, also known as The Step-Right-Up-Folks, Amazing, Astounding, Marvelous, Wonderful, Devious, Dastardly, Death-defying, Dog-gone, Dazzling, Daring Jumping Spider! Or maybe just the Daring (or Bold) Jumping Spider. Commonly found in Old-fields, they like to find relatively open spots within them to hunt. Then, they can use a little cover on the edges and stalk something in a small opening where their eyesight is a big advantage. Then, and only then, they make a Daring leap! There is photographic evidence of this species eating an earwig. I think all of us in the United States can agree that this is fantastic news.

When I tell you to jump, you’re gonna say ‘How high?’ Sergeant Hulka in “Stripes”

If you are still repulsed or even horrified by spiders, I make it my mission to transform your perception if possible. Mark my words, I shall take thy repugnance and cleave it in twain. Face it, Jumping Spiders are astounding in the most splendid way. They’ve even got large, almost human-like calf eyes, which makes them cute right? Those eyes are iridescent and the body color schemes are really cool, sporting some metallic green or blue accents at times. And they are downright fun to watch. Even if you are usually freaked out by how spiders move, these will fascinate and charm you. They are that different and that amazing. Does this almost sound like they’re worth a look?



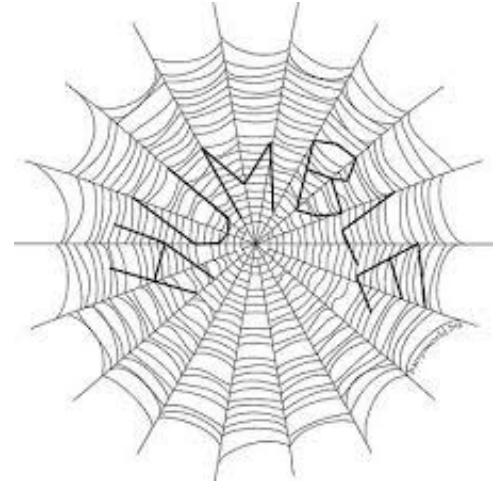
Why did the fly fly? Because the spider spied her. Old English Riddle

They can also be very beneficial to humans (I understand this is a dangerous statement—if we live by this sword, we tend to keep only the ‘things’ we deem worth keeping). In Hillyard (1998) regarding agriculture: “Humans have a choice: Either conserve spiders as allies in the battle against destructive insect pests, and tolerate occasional spiders in fruit and vegetables, or risk [more] chemical residues on their food.” I agree, going so far as to never kill a spider at home and even wishing them good hunting. If this is not enough, perhaps Charlotte can convince you. What Rudolph is for Reindeer, she is for Spiders.

“Nobody feeds me. I have to get my own living. I live by my wits. I have to think things out, catch what I can, take what comes. And it just so happens that what comes is flies and insects and bugs. And furthermore,” said Charlotte, shaking one of her legs, “do you realize that if I didn’t catch bugs and eat them, bugs would increase and multiply and get so numerous that they’d destroy the earth, wipe out everything?” E. B. White “Charlotte’s Web”

And so we bid you farewell and good hunting. Jump, little spider...
jump for all you’re worth.

Mike



References:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phidippus_clarus

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phidippus_audax

<http://spiders.entomology.wisc.edu/>

<http://www.uwgb.edu/BIODIVERSITY/biota/arthropods/Arachnids/>

Hillyard, P. 1998. *The Book of the Spider: A Compendium of Arachno-facts and Eight-legged Lore*. The Hearst Corporation, New York, NY

Levi HW, Levi LR. 1968. *Spiders and Their Kin: A Golden Guide*. Western Publishing Company Inc. Racine, WI

Milne L, Milne P. 1980. *National Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Insects and Spiders*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York, NY

The Retzer Plant Sale - Your Thoughts

Richard Bautz.

We wish to thank the many people who purchased native plants during our spring and fall plant sales over the past years. We would like your opinion on what you would like the Retzer Plant sales to become in the future. I believe the Retzer Nature Center was one of the state's first Nature Centers to begin selling native plants (back in the 1970's), and has cultivated a loyal group of native plant aficionados. It has been a pleasure to serve our customers with both plants and practical advice on incorporating native plant species into their home garden, and farm landscapes. The Retzer nursery staff consists of two half-time positions, and now our duties will be shifting to the higher priorities of land management and seed production for County-wide park system landscape restoration. Additionally, the loss of the Retzer barn greatly reduces the nurseries' storage space, and eliminates our ability to overwinter. Spring divisions of overwintered plants had greatly increased our ability to produce larger weed-free potted plants. As circumstances reduce the operating efficiency of the nursery operations, adjustments must be made. Again, we would like to hear from you about what you wish to see for the future of the Retzer Plant Sales.

In conversations with sale patrons, we hear requests for greater plant diversity, more shade tolerant plants, more spring ephemerals like bloodroot, hepatica, cut-leaf toothwort, twinleaf, etc., shrubs like hazelnut, witch-hazel, prairie rose, etc., and selections of woodland plants like sassafras, hog peanut, a variety of ferns, etc., also prairie plants that do not grow six feet tall.

As an alternative to the traditional plant sales, we are exploring options, including the possibility of pre payment for plants you select in advance and then pick up here at Retzer on the traditional Plant sale day the Saturday before Mother's Day.

Please let us know what direction you would like to see for the future Plant Sales, and email your response to:
rbautz@waukeshacounty.gov



ON BOARD WITH THE FRIENDS

Friends of Retzer Photo Contest

The deadline for entering your best pictures from Retzer Nature Center or from a Retzer sponsored trip is Oct. 29, 2014. Please pick up a brochure for all of the details at Retzer Nature Center or go on line to the Home Page of FriendsOfRetzer.org for all of the details.



Even if you do not have a photo to enter, please join us for the awards ceremony on Sunday, Nov. 2, 2014 from 1:00-3:30 PM

NEW!

INTERPRETIVE SIGNS

NEW!

The new interpretive signs have all been installed at Retzer Nature Center. Not only are the signs well done, but even the posts on which they are installed display the flora and fauna of the area. The next time you go for a hike at the Nature Center, please take time to read these wonderful interpretations of all that we love about Retzer.



Fall Colors on the Prairie

We often think of Fall as a time when the leaves on the trees turn colors and we hear them rustling in the wind on a cool, crisp autumn day. There is a beautiful change of colors on the prairie too! This time of year, when I am out collecting seed, I get to see a variety of color change-seasonal, change-blooming, succession of flowers and grasses here at Retzer.

Curtis in "The Vegetation of Wisconsin" (page 278) describes it in these words. "In the autumn, a large number of asters, goldenrods, and sunflowers add to the flowering parade, but while these individually are colorful or even brilliant, somehow their effect is weakened by a diluting or curtaining action of the tall grasses."

Yes I agree! The purples, blues of the asters like New England and smooth blue are like bright splotches of paint on a canvas. So are the variety of yellows, oranges of the goldenrods, and sunflowers. But the prairie grasses like big bluestem, Indian grass and little bluestem are often more dominant. Their mass and height (big bluestem and Indian grass are over 6') are impressive in themselves. Though not as tall (about 3'), little bluestem and side-oats grama are an important part of the prairie grass family also. The grass color tones exhibit reds, oranges yellows, purples and blues. To me, the prairie is an artist that knows how to mix colors and express them like a master!

Janet MacIver

Seasonal Biologist



Follow Up to - Ask The Expert (Spring Centerline)

If you remember the article I wrote on coyotes in a previous Centerline, here are some interesting observations I made this past summer and fall. On a farm in Dousman I am familiar with, I came across a coyote “playground” in August, and another in October. The first was in an old farm gravel pit, now overgrowth with smooth brome grass, Canada goldenrod, honeysuckle and red cedar trees. A grassy area of about 12 feet by 12 feet had been flattened by coyotes rolling about on the grass. Nearby patches of bare sand were crisscrossed with coyote tracks and there were pieces of a deer’s leg bone and vertebra, a few turkey feathers, and coyote scat. So far this is quite normal, but along the west edge of the trampled area was a patch of sand with an old rusty toy truck and a toy manure spreader. The toys were each about twelve inches long, lying side by side, up side down. As I got closer I could see that the old hard plastic tires had been chewed on extensively. I knew that years ago the farmer used the end of the gravel pit to throw junk, like tin cans, an old washing machine, etc. The second observation was in a CRP field just north of the old gravel pit, with an area of flattened grass about 18 feet by 24 feet. This time the chew-toy of choice was a hard plastic broadhead cover, from an archer’s bow-mounted arrow quiver.

No doubt the resident family group of coyotes entertains itself with play-time, so why do they do it? For the most part it is the young-of-the-year that spends the most time in play activities. Actually they are practicing stalking, pouncing, killing prey, as well as aggressive and defensive behavior towards other coyotes, from setting the pecking order within the pack to practicing for future interactions with neighboring coyote packs.

Dick Bautz



**Give a gift the whole family will
enjoy!**



Friends of Retzer Nature Center Membership

Members enjoy free admission to the best Family Events in Waukesha County.

Wild Winter Night February 7, 2015 6 - 9am

Apple Harvest Festival September 19, 2015 9am - 5pm

How O Ween October 16, 2015 6 - 9pm

.....

Additional Free Family Events :

Waukesha JanBoree January 18, 2015 10am - 4pm

Earth Day Celebration April 19 - 25, 2015

See the Waukesha County website for more information on all these events and more.

Stop by Retzer Nature Center for a membership brochure or
join online at www.friendsofretzer.org



RETZER NATURE CENTER

WAUKESHA COUNTY PARKS & LAND USE

S14W28167 MADISON STREET

WAUKESHA, WI 53188

Return Service Requested

Friends of Retzer Nature Center

The Friends of Retzer Nature Center is a registered, 501 (c)3, organization dedicated to encouraging, perpetuating, and promoting the work of conservation and natural resource education.

The organization seeks the involvement of the community in the form of financial and volunteer support to work toward the continued growth and improvement of Retzer Nature Center. If you would like to become a member or view some of our projects and activities, please visit our web site at <http://FriendsOfRetzer.org>.